



**John the Soldier**, by Luísa Ducla Soares Illustration by Morena Forza

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Once upon a time there was a soldier called João. He was used to hoeing corn, to water cloves, and to sow cabbages and basil.

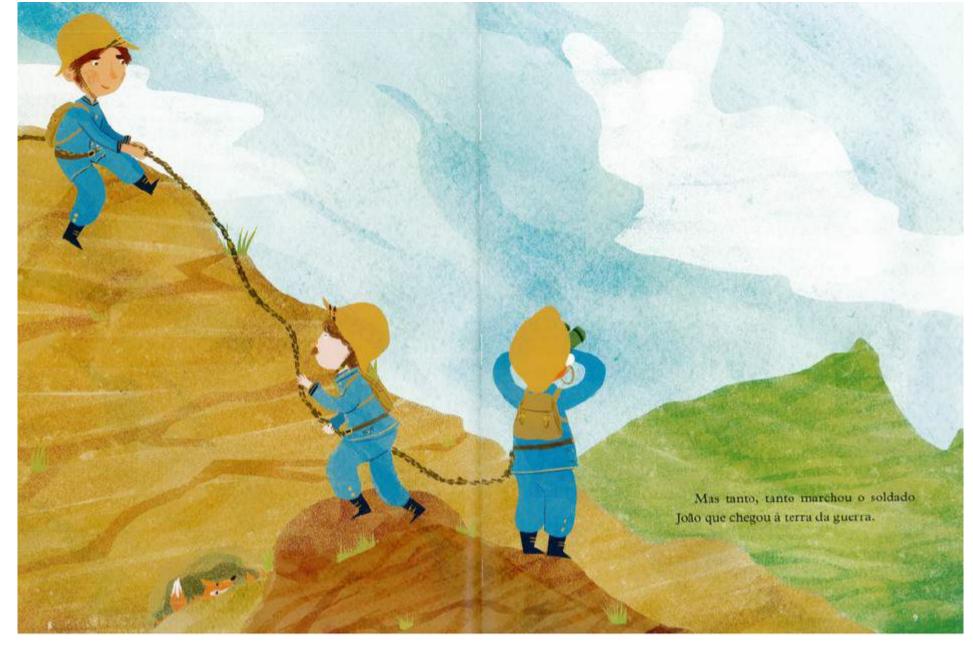


Now keep on marching, with a riffle on the shoulder, a bagpack, some tall boots, and a neat uniform.

Throughout the endless fields, soldier João was an embarrassment to the battalions. He had a flower on his chest, would put his hands inside the pockets, scratched the nose and couldn't march orderly. The worst of all is that he whistled, or sometimes sang popular songs from his village.



The sergeant tried ragging on him, the captain tried warning him, the general tried punishing him. And the soldier João kept marching, happy and carelessly, as if he was going to the fair to buy cattle, or to the market to sell beans.



But so much marching led soldier João to the war land.



All soldiers loaded their riffles and aimed. But soldier João thought it was indelicate not complimenting the colleagues from the other side. He laid down his gun, jumped over the trench and extended a hand.

The other soldiers, surprised, also extended their hands.



"Fire!", the sergeant shouted. / "Shoot!", the captain demanded. / "Discharge!", the general ordered.

But there were so many soldiers, that it took a long time to compliment each one of them!



The sergeant had to face the soldier João and say: "Boy, can't you remember what I taught you, that the war is to kill? You're becoming a bugler, since you're not good at shooting."

And soldier João picked his bugle. There he is blowing, and letting the fandango echoing across the fields, inviting everyone to dance.



The troops tap danced, whirled around, clapped their hands.

"Halt!", the sergeant shouted / "Enough!", the captain demanded. / "Stop!", the general ordered.



The sergeant took the bugle away from soldier João and, angrily, said:

"You're working as a cook for the Army. At least you won't be slowing down the war."

As soon as he arrived at the kitchen, the soldier João reached out for coffee. And he dragged the huge smoky pan, with a delicious perfume, across the ranks.



He would get close from each soldier, take their helmets off to use them as bowls, and pour inside a ladle of coffee. Either friends and enemies, everyone were delighted with such unexpected breakfast.

<sup>&</sup>quot;In place!", the sergeant shouted. "Get ready!", the captain demanded. "Line up!", the general ordered.